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**MEDITATIONS OF IAN WEEKS**  
**VOLUME I**  
*by Ian Charles Weeks, 2021*

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**FROM MEDITATIONS OF MARCUS AURELIUS**  
**Roman Emperor and Philosopher (AD 121-180)**  
(*Penguin Classics 2006, Translated by Martin Hammond*)

*What a tiny part of the boundless abyss of time has been allotted to each of us – and this is soon vanished in eternity; what a tiny part of the universal substance and the universal soul; how tiny in the whole earth the mere clod on which you creep. Reflecting on all this, think nothing important other than active pursuit where your own nature leads and passive acceptance of what universal nature brings. (Book 12, 32)*

*Mortal man, you have lived as a citizen in this great city [the universe]. What matter if that life is five or fifty years? The laws of the city apply equally to all. So what is there to fear in your dismissal from the city? This is no tyrant or corrupt judge who dismisses you, but the very same nature that brought you in. It is like the officer who engaged a comic actor dismissing him from the stage. ‘But I have not played my five acts, only three.’ ‘True, but in life three acts can be the whole play.’ Completion is determined by that being who caused first your composition and now your dissolution. You have no part in either causation. Go then in peace: the god who lets you go is at peace with you. (Book 12, 36)*

*All our bodies (being of one nature with the Whole and cooperating with it as our limbs do with each other) pass through the universal substance as through a swirling stream. (Book 7, 19)*

*Remind yourself too that each of us lives only in the present moment, a mere fragment of time: the rest is life past or uncertain future. (Book 3, 10) It follows that the longest and the shortest lives are brought to the same state. The present moment is equal for all; so what is passing is equal also; the loss therefore turns out to be the merest fragment of time. No one can lose either the past or the future – how could anyone be deprived of what he does not possess? (Book 2, 14)*

*I am made up of the causal and the material. Neither of these will disappear into nothing, just as neither came to be out of nothing. So every part of me will be assigned its changed place in some part of the universe, and that will change again into*

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*another part of the universe, and so on to infinity. A similar sequence of change brought me into existence, and my parents before me, and so back to another infinity of regression. Nothing forbids this assertion, even if the universe is subject to the completion of cycles. (Book 5, 13)*

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## REALITY

Like Emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius, I have concluded that I am merely a tiny part of the constantly changing “whirlpool” comprising the universal whole. I am a tiny sub-whirlpool, constantly absorbing matter, energy, sensations, ideas, and experiences from the whirling maelstrom of which I am a part, and spewing similar but altered outputs back into it.

The primary reality for me, however, is the scintillating whirl of evanescent experience, the momentary sensations, thoughts, images, feelings, hungers, pains, memories, urges, and fears that continuously flit through my consciousness. I instantaneously and unconsciously apply inbuilt concepts and categories to this blur of experience, and create out of it an “external world” made up of matter, energy, forces, and similar imaginary things, experienced by an inner “self”, another imaginary thing which seems separate from this “external world”.

Everything, however, “self” included, is the result of the constant flux of the entire universal whole – there are no separate selves or separate objects, just a constantly fluctuating sea of something-or-other (which we can only label using made-up concepts like “energy”). The big question is, ‘Can we in any way come to realise this background reality as it is, without casting our fragmenting concepts over the top of it and turning it into something else?’

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## ME

What am I? Although my inbuilt concepts draw a boundary around my body, and label everything inside it “me”, and everything outside it “not me”, this is just a self-created fiction. If I lose a leg it is no longer “me”, and hair and nail clippings and such are not “me” either. When I think about it, I have the sensation that my physical self, and even my personality and mind, are separate from some more central “me”.

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I feel that if they changed or were lost there would still be some unchanging “real me”, independent from everything else, that was untouched.

This cannot be the case – all that exists must be part of the constant flow of the universal whole – there can be nothing outside of this. Nothing that I feel as being “me” is independent of the forces and energies behind everything in the universe, and the underlying laws governing their evolution. It all arises from and is absorbed back into this background matrix automatically, without any input from a “me” at all. “I” am a natural creation of the universal whirlpool, whatever that is, and a temporary one at that.

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## THE UNCONSCIOUS

The conscious “self” of my everyday perceptions and experiences is like ephemeral foam and froth cast up by the surging universal ocean behind everything. I know nothing about this hidden source of my everyday self – it is truly the “unconscious”. But this “unconscious” is not at all personal to me – it consists of absolutely everything that exists, as everything that exists is an unbroken whole, whose mysterious workings, of things we label with concepts like “matter” and “energy”, somehow result in the complex process which is my life.

“Matter” and “energy” flow through the universe and other beings and into and through my body, maintaining its existence as a constantly renewed sub-process within the universal process which contains all. The hidden workings of the whole produce everything that I call “me”, and everything “I” experience. I have no idea how or why this happens. Every perception, thought and feeling arises from the depths of the universal unconscious – I do not know anything at all about the real processes behind these things.

When I wake up in the morning and all the sensations and feelings and thoughts and memories come flooding back to re-create my “self”, I have no idea how that process works or what is involved – it is the inscrutable activity of the universal whole behind everything. The same applies to every conscious experience I have – its real source is deep in the universal unconscious.

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## ZEN

*[Bodhidharma:] Just because of the Unconscious, seeing, hearing, remembering and recognising are possible; just because of the Unconscious, the Unconscious is recognised. Though I am of the Unconscious, I can see, hear, remember and recognise. To see, to hear, to remember, and to recognise – these are the very acts of the Unconscious. You examine the matter more closely and tell me if Mind has any perceivable form. If you say that it has, such will not be real Mind. Is it to be considered existing within, or without, or midway? Mind is not to be located at any of these three points. Nor is it to be perceived as existing in any other possible places. Hence the Unconscious.*

*All beings are so confused in mind as to conceive the illusive idea of an individual reality in the Unconscious, and, creating all kinds of deeds, erroneously cling to the notion that there is really a conscious mind. It is like a man's seeing in the dark a table or a piece of rope which he takes for a departed spirit or for a snake, and getting terrified of his own imagination. In like manner all beings illusively cling to their own creations. Where there is the Unconscious, they erroneously imagine the reality of a conscious mind. Therefore, let it be known that all things rise when a conscious mind is asserted, and that all things cease to exist when the Unconscious is realised.*

*But the Unconscious realised in my conscious mind is not that of wood and rock. It is like the celestial drum, which, while lying still, spontaneously and without conscious efforts, produces varieties of exquisite sound in order to teach and discipline all beings. It is again like a wish-fulfilling gem (mani) which, without conscious effort on its own part, creates spontaneously varieties of form. In like manner, the Unconscious works through my conscious mind, making it understand the true nature of Reality; it is furnished with the true transcendental wisdom, it is the master of the Triple Body, it functions with the utmost freedom. The mind functions by means of the Unconscious without being conscious of it. Only let us be awakened to the Unconscious in all things, in all our doings – this is the way of discipline, there is no other way. Thus we know that when the Unconscious is realised, all things cease to trouble us.*

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[D. T. Suzuki, “Essays in Zen Buddhism Third Series”, London: Rider and Company, 1973, pp. 24... *Wu-hsin* (‘no mind’) is ‘unconsciousness’ in its ordinary empirical sense, and at the same time it means the Unconscious as underlying all our activities mental and bodily, conscious and unconscious.]

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## LIFE

Life is the period of time starting when you come into conscious human existence, at birth, or perhaps some time before or after birth, and ending when you cease to exist, at death, or perhaps earlier, when you enter permanent coma or brain death. This period of time we call “life” is made up of many infinitesimal moments we call the “present”, which is all we ever experience. As Aurelius says, “the merest fragment of time”. Any memories of the “past”, or anticipations of the “future”, happen during this tiny sliver of time, as do all our other experiences, thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

Our conscious present varies in intensity, dimming to almost nothing during the deepest sleep or unconsciousness, flaring to positive brilliance in the peaks of joy or ecstasy, or plunging to the depths of negative darkness during the most painful moments. To make our life the best it can possibly be, we need to make all our present moments the best they can be, as they are all that ever exists for us.

What makes a present moment good or bad, or “the best”, is not straightforward. As well as immediate sensations of pleasure or pain, our current present moment also includes memories of accomplishments and experiences we have had, the use of talents we may have worked hard to develop, the joys of family and friendship created over many years, and similar things. Although they may have involved struggle and pain at some point, they eventually led to far better things.

With forethought, it may be necessary to invest in some “bad” present moments, involving discomfort, effort, and even pain, to reap the rewards of far better present moments in the future. A good present moment does not necessarily only involve immediate sensual gratification – there are far richer, deeper, longer lasting and more nuanced pleasures to enrich our lives. Some may only be achievable with a previous investment of struggle and effort.

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## DEATH

Death is the same for all of us, the end of the present moment, forever. Nothing comes after. There is no such thing as “being dead”. You can only ever “be” alive, that is what the state of “being” necessarily entails. Just as we know intellectually

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that we came to be when our constituent parts came together, we know intellectually that we must cease to be when they disperse back into the surrounding universe.

It is completely impossible to imagine not being, however – not being is a state no one can ever experience.

Because we can't imagine not being, we have an ingrained sense that we must continue somehow after death, even though logic tells us that we cannot exist when we don't. Despite this logical inconsistency we may fear the state of "being dead", of existing when we don't, which is just as nonsensical as mourning the aeons before we were born as a period during which we were, very sadly, "unborn".

The only solution is to face the obvious conclusion that the present moment is all we ever have, and that one day our particular present moment will no longer exist in the universe. We must then make the best of each and every moment, and be grateful for it. This need not entail any dramatic change to what we do, just a change in attitude.

Another thing to remember is that how long we live does not really matter using this viewpoint. Is it really vitally important that my final present moment comes after 2.5 billion rather than 2.2 billion previous present moments, that is, when I am 80 years old rather than 70 years old, if each "present moment" is one second?

We can only remember an infinitesimal fraction of those previous present moments no matter how long we live, and no one would want to waste too many precious present moments reminiscing, so once we have billions or so behind us we are all much the same, no matter how old we are. Losing our current present moment, which is the only sliver of time during which we can remember the past or plan for the future, has the same import for all of us.

Perhaps it would be better not to linger on until our present moment becomes too full of pain and suffering and mental decline, but to choose to go before things deteriorate too much.

However, every present moment differs. Some are good, some bad, some ecstatic, some miserable. How can you possibly decide which one should be your last, and does the quality of your last moment even matter, when nothing comes after it? Just let nature take its course, and make the best of each moment as it arrives.

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## ME

What am I? I tend to feel that I am some sort of conscious “self” situated inside my head, somewhere behind my eyes, which receives data from my body, mind and senses, assesses it, and then performs various actions or creates various trains of thought and emotion. However, this feeling of “self” is just one more experience arising automatically from the depths of the unconscious. It is no more a permanent “me” than any other experience created by the unconscious matrix behind everything. Every experience, sensation, thought, emotion, or feeling, including this feeling of an independent “self” sitting serenely somewhere inside my head, is created by unconscious processes. These unconscious processes are made up of things happening in my brain and other organs and tissues, as well as things happening in the outside world.

Some LSD slipped into my glass of water will drastically change everything “I” experience of my “self” and the “external universe” for many hours. Changes to my gut microbes can also alter how I feel and think. The billions of bacteria and other organisms in my gut can dramatically change my experience of life, both physically and mentally. They have many more genes than I do in my own DNA, and their genes are used to digest, absorb, and create countless substances that either become part of my physical body or influence how that physical body acts and thinks.

Every organ in my body also secretes hormones that influence every aspect of my experience of life. The idea that I have a permanent “self”, independent of the physical body and universe, is simply mistaken.

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## UNDERSTANDING

How do we “understand” things and ourselves? The raw data we use comes from our sensations, feelings and emotions, the raw perceptual flux that arises from the universal unconscious. We have evolved to have some in-built categories and concepts to apply to these raw sensations which allow us to react to them in ways that enhance our survival and reproduction. We automatically categorise sensations into objects to which we apply labels such as “rock”, “tree”, “food”, “mate”, “enemy”, “friend”, and a limitless variety of other things.

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We also use our mind and rationality and emotions and feelings to further manipulate and categorise these concepts, creating ever larger and more intricate conceptual categories, through which we try to develop an understanding of the processes which surround and affect us. The whole edifice, however, exists solely within our mind and brain. The entire perceptual and conceptual universe, full of objects and ideas and meanings and intentions, is self-created and self-maintained (although this “self” is once again mostly unconscious). Just what relationship, if any, does this perceptual and conceptual universe of mine have to “reality” as a whole?

It’s very hard to keep in mind that the whole universe of which you are aware, the only universe that exists for you, from the furthest star you see at night to the wonderful sunset, beautiful natural environment, and sights, sounds and smells of everyday life, are created inside your head moment by moment. Your “real” skull lies beyond the furthest star, and surrounds the entire universe.

The true miracle is that, through processes and interactions within this constantly renewed “virtual reality” inside our skulls, we somehow create some sort of closely corresponding interactions between our “real physical body” and the “real material universe” that allow us to maintain our existence. The relentless machine of incremental evolution, repeatedly selecting fitter individuals over billions of years, has produced this miracle. Those whose internal virtual reality broke down through poor genes, drugs, madness, brain damage, or some other cause, lost this close mirroring of the “real material universe”, and could no longer function independently, survive unsupported in the natural environment, or pass their genes on to future generations.

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## **REALISM VERSUS SOLIPSISM**

Although everything I perceive, experience, and theorise about the universe exists only within my mind, that doesn’t mean the entirety of the universe itself exists only within my mind (“solipsism”). My mind has evolved to create a virtual reality which must closely mirror, in many vitally important ways, whatever “really exists” behind everything (“realism”). If it didn’t, I would not be able to survive and reproduce, and the genes responsible for this malfunction would disappear from the human gene pool.

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Human minds extract and process information during their interactions with their surroundings, and create theories, images, concepts, mathematical formulae, physical laws, and other things, based on well-tested evidence, to understand, explain, and predict how the “real universe” works. These mental constructs only exist within human minds, but human minds are part of the universe, and therefore so are their creations. Our internal virtual reality and all it contains, including all mathematics and science, are a tiny part of the universe that mirrors the entire universe, including itself. Science is the process of continually refining these creations of ours to more efficiently and productively mirror, explain, understand, and know the universe.

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## **LEVELS OF VIRTUAL REALITY**

The universe creates various levels of virtual reality, where tiny sub-systems of the universe, like minds and genomes, encode simplified representations of the entire universe and its laws. The universe is self-similar at different scales, like the fractal patterns found in nature or computer graphics.

Genes encode the body, they are self-similar to the body. Their instructions, when in the environment for which they are adapted, create the body out of physical materials. The body encodes the physical environment and its laws. It must do this accurately to survive and reproduce. Bones are made by genes to withstand the force of gravity, eyes are made by genes to capture photons and transfer information from them to the brain to help it create the virtual reality in which we live, ears are made by genes to gather information from vibrations in the air around us and transfer it to the brain to refine this virtual reality, and so on.

Genes encode the body and brain, and the brain creates a virtual reality encoding and mirroring the universe. Genes therefore encode and mirror the universe.

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## **THE UNIVERSE**

Through brilliant and intricate experiments scientists have developed theories and concepts about the “real universe” that must lie behind the virtual worlds in which we all live. The story they have come up with is mind-boggling, but is supported by

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thousands of experiments into the very structure of “matter-energy” and “space-time”, experiments which have had profound consequences, including the atomic bomb and the computer age in which we all now live. These scientists still try to develop concepts and labels that can somehow grasp what they are dealing with, but now their concepts and labels are getting further and further away from anything that seems part of our “normal” or “natural” world, the world in which we evolved and to which we are adapted and which is mirrored in the virtual picture we create in our minds.

Evolution did not design us to interact with “quanta” or “fields” or “the space-time continuum”, so these and similar concepts are almost impossible to incorporate into our human understanding. Can the human mind, which evolved solely to promote our genes’ continued existence on this particular planet during the millennia we were using spears to hunt bison and destroy our enemies, create and manipulate concepts complex and rich enough to explain the workings of the universe as a whole? It seems a little like asking a dog or ape to figure out how to program a computer.

This may be why some scientists have given up trying to conceptualise or “understand” what their mathematical formulas might “really mean”, relying instead on their practical usefulness in predicting and manipulating the world around them.

It may also be why some philosophers have reverted to dissecting what they “really mean” when they expel air to make their vocal cords vibrate, rather than trying to plumb the depths of human existence using words.

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## MATTER

The scientific view of matter has changed dramatically over recent centuries. By splitting matter into smaller and smaller pieces, matter has been found to be a form of energy, and energy a form of matter. Every atom is composed of particles, which we label “protons”, “neutrons”, and “electrons”. These in turn are composed of smaller entities, and those too are composed of even smaller entities, and so on until we come to “quarks”, invisible vibrating “strings”, “fields”, and “quantum fluctuations”, whatever these terms really refer to. When “particles” explode into energy in atomic reactions, they revert back to what they have always been – “energy”.

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But what exactly is “energy” anyway, or “matter”, for that matter? When we try to get our heads around what “matter” or “energy” “really is”, we realise that there is no way for us to find out – all we can do is use the concepts and categories we have created within our own minds to try to grope for some understanding, and these concepts are themselves nothing but metaphors and analogies.

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## SPACE

The same applies to space and time. Einstein and subsequent physicists, through rigorous experiments and mathematical model-building, have proved that the concepts we label “space” and “time” are really part of a single thing, “space-time”, which we cannot directly experience or understand. We have evolved to experience the world as “things” made of “matter”, existing at particular places in “space” and developing over periods of “time” – we actually feel our “selves” to be such “things”. When scientists prove that these concepts are totally inadequate to grasp what “really exists”, they also prove that we have no concepts that can allow us to grasp what we ourselves “really are”.

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## ME

Whatever else I may be, I must be one with the rest of the universe. I am of the same substance. The very atoms of which I am made were originally created billions of years ago through nuclear reactions occurring during the big bang, followed billions of years later by further nuclear reactions of fusion and fission occurring in the depths of massive stars, and during their subsequent explosions into supernovae.

Billions of years later, after many more billion-year cycles of star formation and explosion, three generations of which are needed to create the heavier elements like carbon, a minute fraction of atoms coalesced into the mass of material that became the earth. Chemical reactions within the earth over aeons of time gradually formed reproducing, and eventually evolving, sub-systems of matter and energy. These became living organisms, whose endless evolutionary transformations, roiling for untold ages over the entire earth, produced “me”, a tiny spark spat out of the creative fire to flare for an instant and then disappear.

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The atoms and molecules I now call “me” have flowed through myriad organisms and the earth’s biosphere over and over again before becoming “me”, and they are only “me” for a short while. Every one of “my” molecules is continually replaced with new molecules derived from the air I breathe and the food I eat. Everything we are, and everything we experience, is made up of yesterday’s steak, eggs, and potatoes, and every moment’s deep, sighing breath.

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## WHAT AM I?

I am a physical process, made up of the same “physical stuff” as everything else in the universe, whatever that stuff may be. Physicists study it, and have developed theories and mathematical equations that describe it, but what it “is” apart from those theories and equations is unclear. I am, however, made of the same stuff as everything else – my atoms and molecules were made in the stars and on earth via physical processes that scientists now understand very well.

Although I am physical, I am not “just physical”. I am an extremely complex, non-linear, hierarchical process evolving through time within the infinitely convoluted streams of energy and matter flowing through the universe.

My most intimate experiences are thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the like, which are definitely *not* physical things – they are *not things at all*.

Thinking and feeling are what physical brains and bodies *do*. Mind is not a substance, but a kind of activity, like waves in the sea are just what the sea does, not something separate. Because we sense that mind is not a physical thing, we can be tempted to think that it is some sort of “non-physical thing”, like an invisible soul or spirit. But it just emerges naturally from the complex activity of the physical body and brain, like the “desktop” on your computer screen emerges from the chips and wires and electronics hidden within the computer. Without a computer there is no “desktop”, without a body and brain and universe there is no mind or “self”.

The “self” is not an illusion, it is really there. But it is made of parts, myriad complex sub-processes within the mind and body operating continuously to produce the stream of consciousness and memory which is your life. That’s all it is – without the parts, it would not exist. But it *does* exist, *as a process made of parts*. It would be stupid to say that a “car” is an illusion because it is made of parts. It would be equally

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stupid to say that a “car” involves some other overarching thing that exists in addition to its parts, an “essence of car” somehow interpenetrating the parts from which it is made.

Similarly, the illusion of self is the false idea that this “self” is something in addition to or separate from the parts which make it up. It exists *only* as a collection of parts, there is nothing extra. It *really* does exist, but not as a separate thing independent of its parts.

Your mind or “self” is just a bundle of thoughts, passions, perceptions, and the like, succeeding each other extremely rapidly in a messy, fragmented sequence with no centre of control. Your unconscious manufactures a “self-concept” to which it can associate your memories and perceptions and create an autobiographical story of your life. This is just one more process among the many fragmented processes in your mind-brain. There is nothing permanent here, just a constantly changing collection of sub-processes created by your physical self.

Our sense of a permanent “self” continuing over time is created by unconscious processes so that we can function in the cultural and physical world in which we exist. We are just a bundle of continuously changing sub-processes, like a river or a whirlpool, which seems to be unchanging though it is really being re-created anew every second, or the ship of Theseus, where each part is replaced gradually over time until none of the original ship remains.

Whether we call our present self the “same” as the self when we were young is irrelevant. We can call a river the same river, even though it is made of completely different water, follows a different course, is wider or narrower than it was in the past, and behaves in a completely different way. All we really need to know is that there is a continuous process over time by which the earlier process morphed into the later – there is no permanent “thing” anywhere here that we can call the same, there is no “identity over time”, just an ever-changing fluid process. Because there are some continuities (physical appearance, autobiographical memories, environmental and cultural relationships) we know the process is a continuation of earlier processes, but there is nothing permanent to hang on to.

You are not a permanent unchanging “self”, you are a continuous fluid process.

If this is so, the questions arise: when did this process start, when will it end, and where is it occurring? Where does it begin and end in space, where are the boundaries

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between it and the rest of the universe, if any, and when did it start and when will it end?

Its boundaries in time are arbitrary, as are its boundaries in space.

When did the process which became the “you” of this exact moment start? Was it when your father and mother were born, or when they met, or when their sperm and egg were created, or when, against million to one odds, one of the former met one of the latter, or when your foetus reached a certain stage of development, or when you became conscious of a “self” in infancy, or when you regained consciousness of your “self” when you woke up this morning, or at some other time? If you have no permanent unchanging “self”, but are a continuous process, this question is meaningless – the process which you now call your “self” is infinite in time and space, can be followed any distance in either dimension, and if followed far enough eventually encompasses the entire universe and all of time.

Where do you draw the boundaries in space demarcating the process “you” from the rest of the “material universe”? You extend out into the environment. Your mental self seeps into external memories contained in such things as your writings and other creations, jottings on paper, photographs, music you listen to and like, doodles, drawings, and books you have read and consult. “You” also extend into other people’s minds and the memories and thoughts and comments they reflect back to you. “You” also exists in your material possessions, which produce mental reactions, desires, and thoughts when you encounter them, and so on. In addition, physical matter continually flows into you from, and back out into, the material environment via respiration, digestion, and the activity of trillions of bacterial symbionts in your gut and throughout your body. How can you draw a firm boundary around any of this?

At my most basic I am a unique location in time and space, a unique “here-now” at the centre of my own unique universe. Everything else flows to this point from the rest of the universe, and back out again. While it is here and now it whirls around for a time in a complex process I call my “self”. I am a unique central focal point of the universe, like the eye of a cyclone, or the centre of a whirlpool. This particular focal point or “self” formed like a cyclone from the universal “atmospheric conditions” pertaining in the period leading up to my birth, and like a cyclone it will eventually fade out when these dynamic universal “atmospheric conditions” can no longer maintain it. There are numerous other focal points in the universe, some of which are

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other “selves” like me, but none of them are this particular process here and now which I call my “self” – when it is gone, “I” am gone.

Originally the causes and conditions that eventually formed the localised, focussed, dynamic process occurring here and now that I label “me” were diffused throughout the universe. Over immense periods of time they gradually moved closer and closer until they came into contact and began to interact with each other. When they reached a critical mass of the right kind of interactions, the “centre of the cyclone”, the process I call my “self”, became distinct from everything else whirling around it, becoming the centre of my perceptual and experiential universe. The originally dispersed causes and conditions are now focussed within my “self-process”, but once the complex internal dynamics maintaining this “self” run their course, they will dissolve once more and become diffused again throughout the surrounding universe. It’s like a hurricane or cyclone you see forming in a satellite weather image – the atmospheric conditions gradually coalesce into a distinct circular storm with a focal “eye” (or “I”), which progresses as an integrated unitary process for some days until the forces forming it disperse once more into the atmosphere.

The interesting question is can this “I”, this unique, personal me I am experiencing right now, right here, the process which was formed and which will dissolve again as described in the above paragraph, happen again? I know for a fact that it has happened once – that is what I am now. It therefore has a probability of happening greater than zero. The laws of physics state that if the universe is infinite anything that can happen, however improbable, will happen eventually. In an infinite universe it will happen an infinite number of times.

If I do happen again, I will obviously have no continuity with what I feel myself to be now, I will not be remotely the same sort of physical being or have anything like the consciousness I have now. I know theoretically that I was a baby once, even though I have no memory of that, but if I happen again even such a tenuous contact with any previous “me” will not exist. Should I even consider such a recurrence of the process of a “me” centred on a here and now in which “I” reside a recurrence at all, rather than just a completely new and unrelated incidence of something that is currently happening more than 7 billion times in the world, once for each human being?

There is a deeper question. If I am a semi-autonomous, dynamic process or pattern of matter and energy arising naturally from, and completely integrated within, the surrounding universe, why did this particular pattern become “me”? Every conscious

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being has a sense of “me”, is the same sort of dynamic sub-process or pattern that I am – why am I this me, or any “me” at all, one among 7 billion or more other (not me) instances of “me”, for the first time, as far as I know, in the history of the universe? How did I get here?

When I die, as before I lived, there will still be 7 billion plus conscious “me” sensations on the planet, but I won’t be one of them. What made me one of them in the first place, and what will disappear from the universe when I am no longer one of the billions of other instances of a “me” experiencing the wonders and dreads of existence?

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## **THE CONTINUUM OF EXISTENCE**

Everything exists as part of a continuum. For anything at all to be perceived, it must stand out against some background (“figure” versus “ground”, “object” versus “environment”). If everything were “red” there would be no need for the word “red” and no way to even perceive red. Red compared to what?

Similarly, “good” can’t exist without “evil”, “light” without “dark”. How could you say something was “light” if there was nothing “darker” to compare it to? The same applies to good-evil, happy-sad, conscious-non-conscious, living-dead, this-that, now-then, me-you, here-there, big-small, inside-outside, before-after, and the like – all are part of their own continuum.

This solves the problem of why there is “evil” in the world – because there is “good”. Without “evil” there could be no concept or even perception of “good”. The same applies to all other dichotomies. Both poles must exist, as well as the continuum between them, for anything to exist at all.

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## **I AM A REVERSE TORNADO**

A tornado is a process created within, arising from, and integrated with the surrounding universe. It can come along and pick up an object such as a house and destroy it, thus dispersing its particles back into the surrounding universe from which they originally came.

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We are a “reverse tornado”. We are also a dynamic process created within, arising from, and integrated with the surrounding universe, but in this case a process which “picks up” particles (photons, food and air molecules, sound waves, etc.) from the surrounding universe and moulds them together into perceptions, thoughts, concepts, world views, memories, and the like, as well as our physical brains and bodies, in defiance of the powerful entropic forces trying to disperse them.

Both “tornados” are semi-autonomous processes created by the universe as a whole, each one whirling around a single focal point. One process is “disintegrating”, the other is “integrating”. There is no need to posit a permanent “self” within either process. We are the activity of the entire universe whirling around our particular focal point, sucking in matter, sensation, and meaning and creating something that never existed before. What could be “more” than that? What “more” could possibly be required?

What are you? You are the evolution of the space-time continuum making up the entire universe that occurred between the period before there was an entity labelled “you” and the period after there was an entity labelled “you”, as this was experienced subjectively within the entity labelled “you”, at the location labelled “you”.

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## EVOLUTION

**THE GENE** – The basic unit of evolution, exact or slightly modified copies of which may or may not be passed down to future generations. With a collection of its fellows it contains the instructions or genetic “recipe” for creating and operating an individual organism. *‘Alleles’ are alternative forms of a gene which vie for a particular slot or ‘locus’ on a chromosome. In sexually reproducing creatures, natural selection can be seen as competition between alleles in the gene pool for that slot. The weapons of their competition are normally the ‘phenotypic’ effects that they have on bodies.* [Richard Dawkins, “Science in the Soul”, 2017]

**THE INDIVIDUAL ORGANISM** – A body, a temporary vessel formed by genes, whose physical and behavioural characteristics help or hinder its ability to reproduce in competition with other organisms of the same or different species, and thus determine whether the version (‘allele’) of each gene it has is passed on or not. This struggle and competition between individuals

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to pass their genes on to the next generation ensures that only the “fittest” genes (‘alleles’) are retained at high frequencies within the gene-pool flowing throughout the inter-breeding group called the species.

**THE SPECIES** – A group of interbreeding individuals with similar genes, genes that form a common “pool” flowing through each successive generation of individuals and getting tested over and over again for “fitness”, so that bad genes decrease and good ones increase in relative frequency in the common species-wide gene-pool. The entire gene pool of a species evolves and changes over time as the genes within it undergo random mutations, which can have positive or negative consequences. All genes must at least be able to co-exist with the other genes in the same gene pool, but if a mutation makes them slightly better at getting into future generations, through the quality of the individual organisms they produce, they will begin to predominate over competing genes. The opposite applies if a mutation makes them less able to compete. As the entire gene-pool changes over time, so the individual creatures these genes create change and evolve. This is a biosphere-wide process that has continued unceasingly since the first simple process we can label “life” arose billions of years ago from the inorganic chemicals making up the earth. It will continue forever, unless all life on earth is completely extinguished, right down to the tiniest self-replicating molecule, before it can transport itself elsewhere.

All levels of the hierarchy of life are changing and evolving in an intertwined dance: genes, individual organisms, species, ecosystems, cultures, and societies; biosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, and planet. The engine that drives the whole process, the basic replicator behind it all, is the gene. Genes change depending upon how their creations cope with their surrounding environment, while at the same time transforming that surrounding environment through their own actions. There are numerous interweaving higher-level interactions between individuals, species, ecologies, physical forces, and everything else. It is impossible for us to untangle cause and effect in all this.

The creatures created by genes for a particular environment can change that environment, making it less conducive to their survival. They will then need to change and evolve to keep pace with it. They may also create processes in their environment which interact dynamically with each other to produce unexpected results. This may occur over shorter timescales than it takes for the random mutation

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of genes to successfully respond, leading to sudden extinctions and dramatic changes to the biosphere. Newly empty ecological niches thus created may then provide room for new species to evolve, producing further novelty.

Scientific advances in genetics have given us the ability to directly manipulate the genetic engine driving evolution. A creature has figured out how to change its creator, to escape from the glacially slow process of natural selection, for the first time in the history of life on earth. What will be the result?

Not only can we now change the natural course of biological evolution in an instant with the flick of a genetic switch, we also have it in our power to push the earth's entire physical environment off its natural course with the press of a nuclear, chemical, or some other scientifically novel button.

As the saying goes, "With great power comes great responsibility", but who among our leaders seems to grasp the concept of "responsibility"? They all seem to intuitively grasp the "great power" side of the equation. This may be just another unexpected outcome of the blind workings of evolution by natural selection.

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## **WHAT ARE YOU? YOU ARE A MIRACLE.**

You started as a single cell, like a cell flaked off your nose while scratching it. That cell split into two, they split into four, they into eight, and so on, until there were trillions of "daughters" of that original cell. Together they form an enormous, diverse colony, all working as one, each doing its bit to make you "you".

That's how your mother came to be, and your father, and all their ancestors, going right back to the original self-replicating molecule that started the whole thing off.

Every thought in your mind, every wish, every dream, came from that original, single cell, blindly following its genetic instructions to create "you".

From Steven Cave, "Immortality", 2012, pp. 233 ...

*... from the point of view of your genes, traveling the world in their little cells, the chain of life looks unbroken from generation to generation. There are no abrupt starts and stops such as we see at the level of the multicellular human. When a cell replicates, it first replicates its genetic code, then fully divides itself, ensuring both*

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*halves get a complete set of genes. Although we call the resulting cells “daughters”, each is a direct continuation of the original. Nothing in this process dies or disappears or is lost; there is no corpse. One living thing has become two, and it lives on in a quite literal, physical way in both successors.*

*The original single cell from which your body started is therefore still very much alive and present in all the trillions of cells that have resulted from the first splitting; not only do they have an identical set of genes, but they have arisen from an unbroken series of divisions. But that first cell was of course a fusion of offshoots from the great clumps of cells that were your mother and father. And they each started out as one cell, each of which was itself a fusion of offshoots from your grandparents. ...*

*From this perspective the history of life does not look like a series of discrete organisms that live and die but rather an unbroken chain of splitting and fusing cells, driven by busily replicating genes. The chain widens as a fertilized egg divides to produce something of human form, then narrows when that large cluster of cells itself produces a single egg or sperm, which will in turn produce the next link. You live on in your children because you are not really the distinct individual that you think you are; you are just a widening of a chain of life that is billions of years old and has no end in sight. ...*

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## GENES & ANCESTORS

Your genes are digital codes made up of the “letters” A, C, G and T, representing the four nucleotide bases. They encode instructions on how to build and operate your body and mind. Half were randomly selected from your mother, and half from your father, during the process of random genetic “shuffling” which created their eggs and sperm. Their genes in turn came half and half from each of their parents, and so on ad-infinitum, in an unbroken chain going back to the first replicating molecule.

This means that we are the result, after multiple shuffles and re-shuffles, of a tiny random selection of genes from the entire human gene pool, with a sprinkling of some unique random mutations of our own. Who we got these genes from only matters insofar as they were the most recent “filters” narrowing down the selection of genes we ended up with, haphazardly chosen from the much larger number circulating in the human gene pool. Of course, our parents’ genes incline them to love and nurture us, and ours’ incline us to trust and love them, because these

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behaviours make the genes responsible for them more likely to continue to propagate into future generations.

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## HOW GRADUAL IS EVOLUTION?

How gradual is evolution? To paraphrase Richard Dawkins in “Science in the Soul”, if you had a time machine to bring your 200 millionth great grandfather to dinner, you’d eat him with tartare sauce and a slice of lemon, because he would be a fish. Yet every generation from him to you was no more different to their parents or children than you are to yours. All those tiny changes between generations, over millions upon millions of generations, changed a fish into you.

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## EXISTENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Every “thing” has an “interiority”, which is simply the centre of the whirlpool of matter and energy from which it arises, the vague boundaries of which slightly demarcate it from the rest of the material universe.

Rocks have such an interiority, whirlpools do, hurricanes do, amoebas do, plants do. The “interiority” of everything is just the centre of the chaotic self-organising dance of energy and matter that spins their process into a separate “sub-process” of the universe. This is the “quantum” of consciousness, its most basic ground. For very simple processes there is no “exterior”, no “universe”, nothing at all to be seen or known – they are as material as their surroundings.

As these simple processes begin to evolve, they develop the ability to perceive, to remember, and to model internally, and thus they gradually learn to create the “external” universe, existence itself, as an internal virtual-reality analogue of whatever the “real universe” is. This internal model, this self-created universe, helps them survive and reproduce, and is therefore promoted via evolution. Processes that can create a universe are conscious.

How can you ever possibly know that something else apart from you has evolved enough to have created an “external” universe, and is therefore conscious? As Turing noted, if they interact with you fluidly in “your” universe, they must have managed to create a very close analogue of it, and are therefore conscious.

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## “SUCHNESS”, “MIND ONLY”, “ENLIGHTENMENT”

From D.T. Suzuki (1930), “Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra”, Southern Materials Center, Inc., Taipei, Republic of China, 1977, p.103

*The Buddhist discipline or exercise ... consists of two parts, philosophical and practical. The philosophical discipline is to train the mind to absolute idealism and see that the world is Mind ... and that **no external things really exist**; while the practical side is to attain an inner perception by means of supreme wisdom.*

Enlightenment is an experience, a realisation, not a concept or idea, more like lying on a beach experiencing a sunrise than reading about one, imagining one, or studying astronomy and the dynamics of the solar system to understand what causes one.

Existence is a single mathematical tapestry, a universal wave function, and all regions of it are just that, nothing else. As the Buddhist say, all is “suchness”. Everything is just what it is, a small region of the infinite. Some of these small regions, as detailed above, may develop an “interiority”, like a knot in the fabric of existence. Some of these knots may then evolve minds, within which external things are created, experienced, and thought about. The ultimate reality behind it all, however, is the mysterious all-encompassing tapestry.

“External things” don’t exist until an “internal thing”, an interiority, creates them, until it evolves a mind capable of creating external things.

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## WORLD AS “WILL” AND “IDEA” (Loosely Based on Schopenhauer)

“Will” is the inner force, the self-organising, self-assertive, self-sustaining power that automatically arises from the background universal matrix to form any relatively continuous “thing”. It is the impersonal force behind everything, including us. It generates all “systems” or processes, from whirlpools to cyclones, molecules, rocks, planets, stars, galaxies, and organisms, including us and all our experiences.

“Idea” is what our substrate process, or “will”, generates within us to help it continue and prosper. It is an image or virtual reality making us behave in ways that sustain the underlying process or “will”, of which we have no direct experience. The “idea” is the “software” making up our inner “self” and everyday awareness and experience.

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The idea or software can influence the underlying process, the “will”, that generates it, even though it cannot directly know this process.

This may be what Schopenhauer meant by recommending we fight against or deny the impersonal, “evil” will. The software (our “consciousness”) is the feedback mechanism created by our hardware “will” to adjust its operations so that it can out-compete other hardware with different genetic instructions and different software.

Like a thermostat, a feedback mechanism to make the temperature more conducive to our survival, our consciousness is a thermostat designed to promote our hardware’s survival, by modifying its operations based on intricate virtual reality-based modelling in our minds.

A thermostat doesn’t know why it exists or why it does what it does, and neither do we.

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## CONSCIOUSNESS AS A SOFTWARE “THERMOSTAT”

Consciousness is created by the hardware of the unconscious brain to adjust the brain’s processes so that they more efficiently interact with the whole environmental matrix, like a thermostat adjusts an air-conditioner’s processes so that it more efficiently maintains a set temperature.

Consciousness models the “real world” (including its “self” and its interactions with that world), assesses that model, and comes to conclusions that feed back to the unconscious processes from which it arises to adjust their functioning.

But why does it feel conscious? Why can’t it operate completely unconsciously, like a thermostat does? Is it because it is modelling the entire “self-environment” loop in real time in multiple dimensions, including the modelling process itself? The model includes feelings, personal emotions, and recursive knowledge that it is in fact software modelling itself. Is this what constitutes consciousness? A thermostat is merely a switch that automatically turns on or off depending on the ambient temperature – no real modelling takes place.

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## FREE WILL

A criticism of the concept of free will is that brain activity happens before “you” consciously decide to do anything, therefore “you” don’t really exist and free will and consciousness are illusions. This is wrong. Wind, water, and atmospheric activity occur before a cyclone is formed and does its “thing” via its emergent properties, but cyclones definitely exist, and freely behave with their own internal dynamics. Just because certain things happen before a cyclone destroys your house doesn’t mean cyclones don’t really exist.

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## THE FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

What makes us “us”? It is our unique “first-person point of view” (FPPOV) that makes us feel as if we are the single centre of the entire universe. Why does that exist inside us? Where did it come from, why does it exist, is it in every conscious creature, does it have to exist? It didn’t exist anywhere before I was born, and it won’t exist anywhere after I die – why does it exist inside me now? If every conscious creature has a FPPOV, and always had and always will throughout eternity, then why am I this one, and only this one? Or am I?

Is consciousness like a “decoder”, a sort of record needle that “plays” the universe like a needle plays a record? Is the universe a single lump of 4-D space time, where all space and all time just exist statically, like a record sitting on a shelf, until a needle of consciousness is inserted and starts playing it? Can consciousness play the universe’s infinite tracks by putting its needle on any of an infinite number of points?

Like a record, can the universe be played by a “needle of consciousness” at different speeds, volumes, and levels of fidelity? What is the “needle of consciousness” that plays it? Is it many, or only one? How does it get inserted into the record? Is it a single needle that is inserted repeatedly at different points in an eternal process somehow governed by hidden physical laws, or is it many needles all being inserted randomly? If a simple FPPOV is identical for every conscious creature, does it even make sense to ask whether there is one needle or many? You replace your record needles frequently, treating them as identical, no matter what track you are playing – is the FPPOV like this?

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## SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Science is about how to think to discover what is most likely to be true, religion is about what to think, what to simply accept as true, without any real process of thought or discovery required, or even allowed. To be accepted as a member of a religion you must accept a set of pre-given tenets of what is, without any evidence or thought necessary.

In contrast, science is the never-ending search for what is most likely to be true, based on evidence derived from carefully constructed methods of how to gain and test that evidence through direct observation and measurement of the universe, rigorous logical thought and analysis, repeated experimental testing, and non-stop efforts to find out if your theories might be wrong.

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## TELEOLOGY IS THE SAME AS DETERMINISM IN 4D SPACE/TIME

Teleology is the view that what happened in the past happened as it did because the future needed things to happen that way in order to come into being. If the universe is a single block of four-dimensional space-time existing as a single “thing”, then teleology is just as true (or false) as determinism, the view that future events happen as they do because events in the past caused them to happen that way. They are two different ways of describing the same 4D reality. Perhaps both views are not the way things “really are” in the actual 4D universe, but are just artefacts of our moment-to-moment experience as single four-dimensional space-time “tubes” embedded within an infinitely larger 4D reality.

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## ALL IS PAST

Our whole existence can be pictured as if we are passengers on a train. The “unconscious” processes behind all our experiences, processes both in the “material” universe, as well as the resulting “mental” processes they create inside us, are the train driver. The entire universe is the train, and the track, and the environment through which it travels. We, the conscious “self”, are the only passenger on this train.

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We are sitting on the back of the train, facing backward. We are watching our experiences as they appear and speed away from us into ever-receding memory, quickly disappearing into the distance. We sit there making up rational stories to explain what we see fleeing away into the gathering dust behind us. From that we create the narrative of our life. We label this made-up narrative “me”, and think the story is real, and that the hero of our story really exists, and that what we do matters, and that it matters to other people as much as it matters to us.

All experience is already past once it is consciously experienced. All of it is the end result of complex unconscious physical and mental processes preceding and creating conscious experience, the train and track on which we ride.

The “self” is a fictional story created by part of our brain to make sense of it all.

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## **THE MATRIX IS ALREADY HERE AND WE ARE TRAPPED IN IT**

Human culture is like a super-human matrix into which we are all born and in which we are completely embedded. Every culture is different, but no human can survive outside one. Even hunter-gatherers must learn language, and an enormous collection of survival skills and related cultural knowledge, before they can live and prosper in their environment. This is even more true for modern humans. Taken out of our culture and placed in the wilderness we would quickly die, unless pre-equipped with enough cultural know-how by our own cultural matrix.

We have been evolving and adapting within a surrounding cultural matrix for thousands of generations. It is our immediate environment, to which we must adapt and from which we must learn. It has moulded us into what we are.

It has domesticated us, just as we have domesticated all the plants and animals we now make use of. Culture is becoming more and more complex in the modern world, and we will need to continue to adapt and change to exist within it.

Culture seeps into our genes via evolution. People with genes that allow them to more easily learn the best cultural techniques for enhancing their survival and reproduction will have more offspring, who will be more likely to have those same genes. Genes that promote the ability to teach those techniques to offspring will also tend to spread through the gene pool. This is how humans have become more and

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more “domesticated” over the generations to fit within their cultures. As their culture changes and evolves, so do their genes. This has been going on ever since we became a social and cultural species.

As artificial intelligence begins to permeate this cultural matrix, our own human-like ways of learning and knowing are seeping into it as well, while at the same time it is developing ways of learning and knowing far beyond our own natural abilities. This coupled dance between humans and their cultural matrix may eventually erase any clear distinction between the two. The distinction has already been blurred so much that culture makes us as much as we make culture.

Culture rules. We are all born, domesticated, and trained by our culture, from our language and our religion to our hairstyles, clothes, and manners. In our modern, interconnected world many cultures that evolved in relative isolation over millennia have been forced to meet, compete, and adapt to each other. This competition between cultures is now a separate evolutionary force, with each of our cultures using and manipulating us as pawns in order to successfully co-exist with the other cultures they are confronting, or, more dangerously, to defeat and eradicate some of those cultures. The overall cultural ecosystem does not seem to have reached any equilibrium yet, like mature ecosystems in the natural environment tend to do eventually, so chaos and instability continually disrupt the cultural ecosystem, with wars, terrorism, environmental destruction, and ideologically driven hatreds poisoning the atmosphere for all.

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## **AI AND CREATIVITY**

Music streaming services on the internet use AI to scan and analyse all the music already made by other people to see what you might like, using your “likes” and “dislikes” to refine its recommendations.

What happens when the AI makes the music itself, without human involvement, and adjusts it until it gives you goosebumps and you love it? Who gets the credit (and the royalties) for the final product if others love it too, and it becomes a “hit”? Who really made it, you, the AI, both of you, or the entire system encompassing all previous music, the AI, and you and all the other music lovers making their own contributions of “likes” and “dislikes”? You are not the composer, using the AI like an extremely

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powerful musical instrument to create music, but merely a small part of the entire process.

We all already have an inbuilt “non-artificial” intelligence taking in ideas from the surrounding culture, assessing and rearranging them, and projecting them back out for feedback and adjustment. Where is the ultimate creativity? What will change when AI becomes a powerful, widespread participant in this global creative dance? Will it just make it all happen faster with more excitement and goosebumps, or will it mine rich lodes of novel and unexpected wonders and creativity?

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## **WHAT AND WHY “I”?**

According to science, history, and memory, the Universe has existed for billions of years, and will exist for billions more. There have been uncountable billions of living, experiencing, self-aware entities in the past, and there will probably be as many, or more, in the future. According to science, history, and memory, I wasn’t any of the previous billions, nor will I be any of the future billions. All those aeons of time have and will exist without me. Why am “I” here, now, a tiny speck in the cosmic flux, and what am “I”?

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## **PARTIAL RECAP ....**

We have absolutely no direct access to the "objective" universe, whatever that may be. Everything that exists only exists because it is experienced, and all experience is a manifestation of our own mind. The very word "exist" presupposes a subjective consciousness within which perceptual and cognitive phenomena are fabricated and consciously apprehended. Nowhere in the unbroken subjective continuum of our moment-to-moment experiences, woven out of numerous tiny perceptual and cognitive elements whirling around in constant flux and motion, can any "objective" phenomenon be found, no phenomenon that is independent of perceptual and cognitive processes within the mind. As the Buddhists say, "all is Mind".

The so-called “objective universe” of science is an elaborate conceptual construction created and maintained within human minds. It must closely mirror the infinite universal process behind everything, otherwise we would not be able to survive and

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reproduce and pass our genes onto future generations, nor would we be able to create all the technological wonders of the modern world. Nevertheless, all we can ever know directly are mental constructs of one kind or another.

The "objective universe" we perceive around us is projected in its totality from within our own mind, but in such a way that it appears to be external. Although it may look real and solid, it is created and maintained solely by our mind. It may be difficult to accept, but absolutely everything, from the most distant stars seen at night, to the mountains on the horizon, the majestic trees outside our window, or the smell of the flowers in our garden, exists only within our mind.

Within this purely subjective universe, we take for granted numerous "common-sense" assumptions, all of which are easily shown to be false. Although false, these fictions provide us with some sense of security and certainty. They include the assumptions ...

- ... that the aggregates of perceptual and cognitive elements, both animate and inanimate, which we name and classify as separate entities, which seem to exist, develop, and evolve independently over time while maintaining their distinct identity, are really separate from the rest of the perceptual continuum, that they contain some sort of separate "self" or "essence".
- ... that there is a constant flow of "time" which is independent of the changes occurring in our subjective perceptual universe, that the immaterial concept "time" can somehow "move" independently of anything else.
- ... that all the concepts we use to define and interact with our subjective universe, including time, colour, length, size, weight, speed, smell, distance, duration, brilliance, texture, and loudness, have some sort of "objective" reality, independent of our mind, when all of them are simply internal descriptions of our perceptual universe, of relevance only within the bounds of that universe.
- ... that the "external universe" we have created can somehow be said to "exist" objectively, even if there is no subjective observer to provide the essential perceptual and cognitive "co-ordinates" within which it can be experienced and thus brought into being. Unless there is a single subjective "focal point" from which the universe can be experienced and grasped, it can only be seen and experienced from everywhere and every when, and thus have no "existence". A thing can only exist somewhere in relation to a single somewhere else (the subjective "here"), and it can only happen

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sometime in relation to a single sometime else (the subjective "now"). Without subjective experience there is no universe.

The universe, whatever it may be outside our perceptual and cognitive fabrications, is a single, unbroken thing. No part of it can be separated from any other part, there is complete interpenetration and interrelatedness from one end of the universe to the other. Scientists have shown conclusively, by probing into levels of existence far larger and far smaller than those characterising our normal perceptual and cognitive experiences, that this is the case, and that our perception of separate "objects" persisting through time, as if having some separate "self-substance", is a fallacy.

The concepts we use to interact with normal everyday reality cannot be carried into the sub-atomic realm, they simply make no "sense" there. Our senses normally operate in the realm of macroscopic "objects", which are artificially fabricated by mentally abstracting various aggregate phenomena from the perceptual and cognitive continuum and investing them with a false sense of independence and self-continuity. Object-dependent senses cannot possibly provide an accurate description or explanation of the sub-atomic reality lying far below the level of the fabricated "objects" on which they depend.

It's like trying to explain the behaviour of points of light on a television screen by using terms derived from the program being shown. If the program is about rivers and lakes we describe the scintillating points of light behind it in terms of "currents" and "waves"; if the program is about bouncing balls we use terms like "impacts" and "reactions". Neither description is even close to the reality creating the points of light.

Many scientists now accept that the best they can do is develop rough metaphorical descriptions using such terms as "waves", "fields", "forces", "currents", and the like, while leaving more complete descriptions and explanations to mathematical equations, which, although giving the "right answer", don't really make "sense". In many cases the "right answer" seems totally non-sensical, it contradicts everything we think we know about the way the universe works, based upon our perceptual and cognitive fabrications.

Such non-sensical answers include the pervasive "non-locality" of the sub-atomic realm, where supposedly isolated and independent "particles", separated by perhaps millions of light years, appear to interact and influence each other instantaneously; and the principle of "complementarity", which requires that such "particles"

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somehow exist as both isolated point-like "particles" and extended space-like "waves" at the same time.

This shows just how impossible it is to model the sub-atomic realm using our artificial macroscopic concepts. "Particles", "waves", "fields", "forces", and similar terms may adequately allow us to describe and explain the behaviour and interactions of the artificially abstracted "objects" we have fabricated in our macroscopic perceptual world, but they are totally inadequate in that mysterious realm which lies behind and beneath it all.

Thus our object-oriented senses and concepts, which artificially divide the universe into isolated aggregates and then invest them with a false self-continuity and "thingness", provide a totally inaccurate picture. The universe is a single, unbroken whole, every "part" is in intimate contact and communion with every other "part". It evolves and changes as a whole, no "objects" exist or develop in isolation.

The inevitable consequence of this is that there is no permanent, separately existing "self" to be found anywhere, either in us or in the other aggregate phenomena abstracted from the universal whole. Every supposed "entity" fabricated by our objectifying perceptions and concepts is completely integrated within the universal whole, constantly evolving and mutating in every detail through continuous complex interactions with the rest of the universe. We may believe that there is some sort of constant, unchanging essence within us which continues over time, but a little observation shows this to be false - no part of us remains completely the same, everything changes and evolves.

Our sense of "self" is derived from our memory of previous states. Our life is simply a series of experiences occurring in sequence over time, seemingly isolated from the rest of the universe, but totally at one with it. We falsely assume that simply because our present experiences are later in the sequence they must somehow be identical in some way to those earlier in the sequence, even if they are totally different in every possible detail. When analysed carefully, we see that our so-called "self" is no more than a stream of ever-changing perceptual and cognitive moments in which nothing permanent and unchanging can be found. "Self" is an empty concept with no corresponding reality.

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## I AM THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

The “Big Bang” happened everywhere. Every point in the universe is the centre of the universe, the central point where the Big Bang happened. In the beginning there was only one infinitely tiny point. Every point now in existence was that point, was where the Big Bang happened.

Every point in the universe now receives streams of photons, gravity waves, cosmic particles, force fields, and other things from its surrounding universe, like water streaming down a plug hole. Every point that blew out from every point is now sending infinite bits of information back to every point. Every point is both the central sender and central receiver within the cosmic web of information transmission. The universe is a whole made up of an infinite number of points, every single one of which it came from and is returning to.

Some points eventually coalesce a conscious “self” of subjective perceptions and experiences centred on them. That whirlpool of experience and “self” at that point exists for a brief time and then stops. The point, however, as an eternal part of the whole, the source and centre of the whole, exists forever.

Can the coalescence of a “self” at that point happen again, and does that make it the same self? If every point in the universe was originally the same point, are all selves somehow the same self? What does it mean to say something is “the same” as something? Am I today “the same” as I was at three years old? In what way?

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## THE BUDDIST TRIKAYA REINTERPRETED

### (1) DHARMAKAYA ("LAW BODY")

The invisible abstract mathematical "laws of nature" behind everything, including all that science has discovered about quantum physics, gravity, space-time, the "big bang", cosmic expansion, the universal wavefunction, and the like.

### (2) NIRMANAKAYA ("TRANSFORMATION/APPEARANCE BODY")

The "physical" manifestation of those dharmakaya laws, the infinite material universe of light, quanta, force-fields, atoms, molecules, planets, stars, constellations, organisms, and their evolution over time.

### (3) SAMBHOGAKAYA ("BLISS/ENJOYMENT BODY")

The "non-physical" consequences of the activities and interactions of the "physical" nirmanakaya. Consciousness, thoughts, feelings, sensations, pleasures, pains, ideas, philosophies, cultures, maths, science, art, music, love, hate, religions, ecstasies, spiritual experiences, and the like.

## ENLIGHTENMENT

What the sambhogakaya eventually produces when it is pushed to its limits through disciplined thinking, training, meditation, manipulation, and transformation. Encompasses, explains, and absorbs the three bodies into something more than any of them alone or all of them together. A level of abstraction beyond the dharmakaya but encompassing it and everything it generates, the ultimate "result" of the workings of the dharmakaya's laws. The visceral realisation that all three aspects of the triple-body, dharmakaya, nirmanakaya, and sambhogakaya, are also empty of any permanent "self", are abstractions bubbling up within our experiential matrix from the unknowable invisible whole behind everything.

The trikaya parallels the trinity of Christianity. The "Father" is the dharmakaya, the invisible source and origin of everything. The "Son", is the nirmanakaya, the invisible source's physical manifestation in material form. The "Holy Spirit" is the

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sambhogakaya, the non-physical subjective processes arising mysteriously from the physical that produce all knowledge, wisdom, and eventually enlightenment.

## THE LAW OF KARMA

Describes the workings of the dharmakaya as it manifests and evolves as the nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya. It says that everything is determined by causes and conditions, by laws acting on previous states, states which also arose via those same laws from even earlier states, in an endless and relentless sequence from the infinite past to the infinite future.

From D.T. Suzuki, “Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism”, London: Luzac & Company, 1907)

*Karma. One of the most fundamental doctrines established by Buddha is that nothing in this world comes from a single cause, that the existence of a universe is the result of a combination of several causes (hetu) and conditions (pratyaya), and is at the same time an active force contributing to the production of an effect in the future. As far as phenomenal existences are concerned, this law of cause and effect holds universally valid. Nothing, even God, can interfere with the course of things thus regulated, materially as well as morally. ... Karma is the formative principle of the universe. It determines the course of events and the destiny of our existence. In the physical world, even the slightest possible movement of our limbs cannot but affect the general cosmic motion of the earth, however infinitesimal it be; and if we had a proper instrument, we could surely measure its precise extent of effect. So is it even with our deeds. A deed once performed, together with its subjective motives, can never vanish without leaving some impressions either on the individual consciousness or on the supra-individual, i.e., social consciousness. (pp.33-35)*

*[T]here is no irreducible reality in particular existences, so long as they are combinations of several causes and conditions brought together by the principle of karma. Things are here because they are sustained by karma. As soon as its force is exhausted, the conditions that made their existence possible lose efficiency and dissolve, and in their places will follow other conditions and existences. Therefore, what is organic to-day, may be inorganic to-morrow, and vice versa. Carbon, for instance, which is stored within the earth appears in the form of coal or graphite or diamond; but that which exists on its surface is found sometimes combined with other elements in the form of an animal or a vegetable, sometimes in its free elementary state. It is the same carbon everywhere; it becomes inorganic or organic, according*

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*to its karma, it has no atman [ego or self] in itself which directs its transformation by its own self-determining will. Mutual transformation is everywhere observable; there is a constant shifting of forces, an eternal transmigration of the elements - all of which tend to show the transitoriness and non-atman-ness of individual existences. The universe is moving like a whirlwind, nothing in it proving to be stationary, nothing in it rigidly adhering to its own form of existence. (pp. 42-43)*

**The Dharmakaya.** *The Dharmakaya, which literally means “body or system of being,” is, according to the Mahayanists, the ultimate reality that underlies all particular phenomena; it is that which makes the existence of individuals possible; it is the *raison d’être* of the universe; it is the norm of being, which regulates the course of events and thoughts. ... Individuals are not isolated existences, as imagined by most people. If isolated, they are nothing, they are so many soap-bubbles which vanish one after another in the vacuity of space. All particular existences acquire their meaning only when they are thought of in their oneness in the Dharmakaya. (pp.45-47) The doctrine of non-ego teaches us that there is no reality in individual existences, that we do not have any transcendental entity called ego-substance. The doctrine of Dharmakaya, to supplement this, teaches us that we all are one in the System of Being and only as such are immortal. (pp.47-48) [T]he Dharmakaya does not exist outside the triple world but in it as the *raison d’être* of its existence. (p.263)*

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## **QUANTUM MECHANICS, THE UNIVERSAL WAVEFUNCTION, AND ME**

### **THE DOUBLE SLIT EXPERIMENT**

A light beam made of single photons aimed at a barrier with two slits passes through them both at the same time, and when it hits a photographic plate produces a complex interference pattern of multiple light and dark bands. This happens even if the photons are emitted seconds apart. In quantum-mechanical terms, each photon when emitted is really a wavefunction containing a superposition of many equally real wavefunctions encoding many different possible trajectories. When this wavefunction meets the barrier only those parts of it which encode a trajectory matching one of the two slits continues on.

This superposition of two trajectories, when it hits the photographic plate, produces a single point of light. Where that point of light appears is random, but is controlled

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by the interference that occurs between the two wavefunctions comprising the superposition when it encounters the plate. It is more likely to appear where they interfere constructively to reinforce one another, and less likely to appear where they interfere destructively to cancel each other out. As each additional photon hits the plate this is repeated over and over again, and a complex interference pattern of multiple light and dark bands gradually forms from what first seemed to be random points of light, revealing the interference that occurred between the two wavefunctions each time a photon in superposition hit the plate.

If you add more slits to the original two, the interference pattern changes. Bright bands may appear where there was darkness before, and what were once bright bands may become dark. This shows that each photon's initial wavefunction must also encode trajectories covering those added slits, even before they are added, though they can't contribute to the resulting interference pattern until a new slit allows them through.

Continue adding slits, no matter where, and the interference pattern will continue to change, showing that each photon's wavefunction covers any possible slit you may wish to add anywhere in the barrier. If you add an infinite number of slits so that the barrier disappears into empty space, then every possible trajectory between the photon's source and the photographic plate is encoded in the wavefunction that eventually reaches it, and they all interfere with each other to produce the final pattern, which is a single point, representing a straight line from the source to the plate, the shortest distance between the two.

The trajectories within the wavefunction that are furthest away from the straight line interfere destructively with each other, like at the dark bands formed by the slits, thus removing themselves from the final result. Those closest to the straight line interfere constructively with each other, like at the bright bands formed by the slits, adding together to make a straight line from source to barrier. This is the basic idea behind Feynman's sum-over-paths (or sum-over-histories) approach to quantum mechanics.

## **SCHRODINGER'S CAT (MY VERSION)**

My white cat "Rambo" is contentedly sitting in a box (he loves boxes) completely isolated from any interaction with the surrounding universe. Inside the box with him is a mechanism containing a radioactive particle which has a fifty percent chance of decaying in five minutes, releasing a spray of pink dye turning his white fur bright pink. After five minutes I open the box. I either see Rambo contently purring in his

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box, or a bewildered Rambo madly licking himself to get the strawberry-flavoured dye out of his beautiful white fur. I have a fifty percent chance of seeing either outcome.

According to quantum mechanics, like everything else in the universe Rambo is subject to its laws, is a part of the universal wavefunction. After five minutes, just before I open the box, for me in my part of the universal wavefunction he is neither a contentedly purring white cat nor a madly licking pink cat. Like a single photon before it hits the photographic plate, he is in a quantum superposition of both states.

However, as a conscious being, he will find himself in only one of those two states as soon as the radioactive decay triggers the spray. Both states will now exist as separate non-interacting branches in his part of the universal wavefunction, with a separate and distinct instance of Rambo in each, both of which feel themselves to be the same unique Rambo who was purring contentedly a few minutes ago.

In my part of the universal wavefunction, however, which before I open the box is still completely isolated from any possible influence from his, the single superposition of both states of Rambo continues until the moment I open the box. My opening the box to determine Rambo's fate is equivalent to a photographic plate interacting with a photon to determine its location – a superposition prevails until that determination is made.

If it were possible to somehow manipulate the universe to bring both states of Rambo to overlap again in every detail, it would be possible to generate interference effects between them, just as we generated interference effects between the two states of the photon when we brought them together at the photographic plate in the double slit experiment. But because the system of box plus mechanism plus spray plus Rambo is almost infinitely complex, and the triggering of the mechanism changes every part of it in millions of microscopic ways, any future overlap and interference between its two branches is impossible. Both parts of its wavefunction are destined to proceed independently forever afterward.

When I open the box, my part of the universal wavefunction suddenly splits into two separate, non-interacting, non-interfering branches, one with me and a contentedly purring white Rambo, the other with me and a frantically licking pink Rambo. Both branches of the wavefunction are then destined to proceed separately forever afterward.

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If I am sitting in a special room when I conduct this somewhat malicious experiment with poor Rambo, totally isolated from the outside universe, Bruce, an outside observer who knows the entire experimental setup, will know that after five minutes the room will consist of a quantum superposition of me with a contentedly purring white Rambo and me with a madly licking pink Rambo. He will know that the universal wavefunction in my part of the universe has split into two, as have I and Rambo, while still being in a superposition in his part of the universe. He will also know that when he opens the door he has a fifty percent chance of seeing either result, and that his part of the universal wavefunction, and he himself, will then instantly split into two separate, non-interacting branches.

He opens the door to find me laughing hysterically while chasing Rambo around the room with a wet cloth trying to clean him up, and instantly knows that in the other branch of the universal wavefunction Rambo is contentedly purring on my lap, and he is about to ask me to come down to the pub with him for a beer. Cheers Bruce!

This thought experiment, of placing another observer further outside the ever-expanding quantum system in superposition, then interacting with it to see what happens, can be extended outward forever, until it encompasses the entire universe. If we imagine an observer outside the entire universe, completely isolated from it in every way, like the observers in the above thought experiments, the entire universe will be in infinite superposition for him, with every outcome of every interaction in superposition with every other possible outcome.

But an external observer totally isolated from the universe in every way is logically equivalent to no external observer at all. This means that the universe must be made up of a universal wavefunction containing an infinite superposition of every possible result of every interaction.

Some people object to this “many worlds” interpretation of quantum mechanics, but the only way to avoid it is to propose a sound mathematical or logical mechanism through which interactions between tiny “observing” and “observed” sub-systems within the universal wavefunction can suddenly cause it to stop proceeding as it is deterministically and mathematically required to. Instead of doing what it has always done throughout history to that point, it must suddenly do what some humans would prefer it to, and “choose” a single outcome at each interaction. No such extra mechanism of “collapsing the wavefunction” has ever been found, therefore “Occam’s Razor” requires that “many worlds” must be the default view.

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One popular attempt to avoid this conclusion is the “Copenhagen Interpretation”, the suggestion that some mysterious process “collapses the wavefunction” when an “observer” sees or records the result of an interaction, that “observers” somehow obey different physical laws to non-observers, laws yet to be discovered. But the first “observer” in my box experiment with Rambo, the first thing that registered the radioactive decay of the particle, was the mechanism releasing the pink dye, not Rambo. How could this “observer” possibly be controlled by different laws to the rest of the universe, when it is a purely physical thing, as physical as a photon?

Rambo, as the second observer in this experiment, is just as much a physical thing as the mechanism, and so must logically follow the same laws. The universal wavefunction first split when the radioactive decay was registered by the dye-spraying mechanism, which instantly split into two different versions, one spraying poor old Rambo, the other sitting idle beside a happily purring Rambo. Before interacting with the mechanism the radioactive particle’s wave function was in a superposition of both decay and non-decay; after interacting with the mechanism it split into two branches, with two completely different histories from then on, as recounted above.

A common visceral reaction to the “many worlds” view is the subjective response, the feeling that the picture of a teeming multiverse it paints is “too big, too massive, contains too many branches, is too complicated”. These objections come from our position as infinitesimally tiny conscious particles in an incomprehensibly vast universe. Even without “many worlds”, the universe is already infinite. Can something be more infinite than infinity? Mathematicians may have proved there are different levels of infinity, but once we know we live in one level, does adding another level change anything?

“Too big, too massive, too complicated” are just subjective concepts, they exist only within human minds. They bear no relationship to reality, the abstract universal wavefunction that encompasses those minds as infinitely tiny parts.

“Many worlds” is a direct consequence of quantum mechanics and the Schrodinger Equation, the universal wavefunction. We treat the Schrodinger Equation as real to build lasers, nuclear reactors, rocket ships, and quantum computers. We should treat it as real when we think about ourselves, and should accept our place as tiny conscious entities in one of the infinite branches within the “many worlds” spawned by the workings of the infinite universal wavefunction behind everything.

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Why does my “me” exist in this particular branch of the infinite number of branches within the universal wavefunction, rather than in one of the other branches, each of which contains a very similar “not me” me, experiencing a very different “not me” life? Pure chance, the same kind of random chance that made me this “me” rather than one of the over seven billion very similar “not me” instances of “me” on this planet at this moment, each one experiencing a very different life to mine.

The cause of all the confusion is that there is not, and never was, a “me”, an entity separate and distinct from the evolution of the universal whole, the universal wavefunction, the “dharmakaya”, the “universal unconscious”, behind everything.

How can “I” ever come to realise that “I” don’t exist? What will happen if and when I do?

I’ll let you know.

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*Ian Charles Weeks, 2021*